

dwell

CONVERSATION

Halsey

TEXT BY
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Lauren



For her latest project, Lauren Halsey returns to her hometown of L.A. to design a public sculpture park (shown in a rendering, opposite) that will act as a community space for Summaeverythang, her nonprofit organization. "It's supposed to be a space that holds you," Halsey says. "It's more than just a cube and columns."

PHOTO: EDDIE SALINAS. COURTESY LAUREN HALSEY STUDIO



The renowned artist is building a public sculpture park for the Los Angeles community that raised her.

Growing up in South Central Los Angeles, Lauren Halsey built sets for church plays, an early passion that has evolved into a celebrated art practice. "I had an appreciation for sculpture," says Halsey. "I remember pretty profoundly that carving things was moving for me." Her large-scale, site-specific installations mix ancient Egyptian forms and other architectural motifs with contemporary Black iconography to evoke striking spatial narratives. The work explores the potential of sculpture and architecture, blending fantasy with reality, the mundane with the spiritual, and archival images with visions of the future. The result is often a funky Afrofuturist approach to monument making.

Halsey's work has appeared at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Venice Biennale, and, currently, the Serpentine Gallery in London, but next spring, she returns to her neighborhood for the opening of a very personal project: a public sculpture park titled "sister dreamer, lauren halsey's architectural ode to the surge in splurge of south central los angeles." Sister dreamer will feature eight sphinxes and Hathoric columns carved with portraits of community organizers and Halsey's heroes, as well as a reflecting

pool and a chamber with an oculus. The park will also offer public programming—including jazz nights, yoga classes, film screenings, and art conversations—organized by the Summaeverythang Community Center, Halsey's nonprofit. Founded in 2020, the organization gives out boxes of produce to families across South Central. The installation will close in fall 2026, but Summaeverythang will move nearby to a permanent home designed by Barbara Bestor.

Though it builds on Halsey's previous work, sister dreamer is "completely different," she says. "It's ours. It's not tethered to an institution or something larger than itself." She goes on: "We create what we want. It's a pathway to freedom." As she was about to open her first solo exhibition in the U.K., *Dwell* spoke with Halsey about the importance of having Black spaces in America, whom she creates her art for, and how community is the foundation of her practice.

How has South Central inspired you, and what do you hope the Summaeverythang Community Center will bring to the neighborhood where your family has lived for generations?

South Central is more complex than the stereotypes some cinema and literature have assigned to its communities. What I haven't seen on display, or on the level of Hollywood, is the brilliant activist context and spirit that have been present here my whole life, which I think I've inherited. Like, regular service work growing up in the Black church, going to a park and seeing matriarchs in the community care for people. I couldn't imagine, whether I was a teacher or sculptor, not wanting to provide resources that are for us. I hope Summaeverythang—which is in its infant stages—can be an all-encompassing, maximalist resource for use in the neighborhood. We're going to beta test the programming that we'll be doing at the permanent Summaeverythang Community Center; it's living architecture.

What will be at sister dreamer?

It's not only sculpture. It's a park that's botanically rich. There will be water features, really tall palm trees, and landscape designer Phil Davis got into the nitty-gritty of seedlings found around the neighborhood. We will see the wildflowers local to the zip code 90047, as well as citrus, guava, and pomegranate. >



“We’ll offer some of everything, from discourse to resources to joy to being a safe zone. And shape-shifting to whatever the needs of youth are.”

LAUREN HALSEY

Since 2020, Halsey’s Summaeverythang has organized donations and deliveries of organic produce out of its existing community center in South Central L.A.

But it has the same themes as my earlier work: local heroes, landmarks, our aesthetic styles, and signage, but just articulated differently. When the sun moves and the oculus creates light and shade, the exterior will be lit differently and way more dramatic because it will have the shadows of the walls.

How did you find space to build?

I haven’t driven much in my life. I’ve always been the passenger. I would take the 207 bus down Western Avenue, and there were a lot of vacant lots. There were a few opportunities for this project to happen about five years ago. First, it was going to be on Crenshaw Boulevard, then Slauson Avenue, then farther south on Western. And then, when I started actively looking, I landed on a lot that

once held an ice cream shop that I visited with friends as a kid. It had burned down around 2016, and the lot was totally vacant except for people selling Christmas trees every year. I thought it was a perfect corner parcel because of its proximity to a school. And as far as a social space goes, there’s a lot of sitting and watching: It’s across the street from a gas station and a car mechanic, and there used to be a mini-market where people sold CDs and incense next door. So I thought, What better place to have a park or plaza?

Does this represent a different approach than when you’re creating work for an art fair or a museum?

It’s the first time ever in my practice where the people who are the subjects of

my work will see it in their own context. That’s who I’m thinking about. The art world will come because they’ll hear about it, but I’m not even talking to them in the ways I might have to in another context.

How does that ambition relate to being a Black American more broadly?

It would be irresponsible of me to think that an institution or another context outside of my own will care about the nuances of the project at the level I do. I’m using the art to hopefully build something in my neighborhood that will not only contribute to a creative and aesthetic landscape, but also contribute to economics, service, and self-esteem. It would just be dumb as a Black person in America to ever think that someone else would do that for me or my community. ■